

Less Robespierre, more hellfire and brimstone eco-cult

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Body

Why take the apocalyptic fantasies of Extinction Rebellion as holy writ? I have a confession to make: I'm scared of Extinction Rebellion. No, not because its members terrify revolutionaries. On the contrary, most of them strike me as hippie-dippy wimps who break down at the sight of a bacon sandwich or an aeroplane flying overhead.

In London, these tree-hugging weirdos spent the past week doing yoga on Westminster Bridge and knitting multicoloured jumpers in Trafalgar Square while in Sydney they lay down in the middle of the street and formed a circle around some kind of plant pot.

They're hardly fearsome radicals. They're less Robespierre and more Rik from The Young Ones.

And I'm not scared of them because their "truth" is cutting me to the core and making me realise my selfish life of eating steak and occasionally going on holiday is propelling the planet into fiery doom.

Most of what they say falls firmly into the category of fake news. If we don't cut carbon emissions to net zero by 2025 then humankind is doomed? I call BS.

No, the reason I'm scared of Extinction Rebellion is because it increasingly behaves like an end-of-world cult. Even worse, this posh death cult, this unhinged predictor of apocalypse, is taken seriously by politicians and the media.

Now that scares me - a lot.

To witness an XR protest is to understand what it must have been like in pre-modern times when there was no shortage of weird religious groups warning anyone who would listen that mankind would soon be consumed by hellfire.

In London I've seen XR people sway back and forth as they chant about End Times. "What will you do when the world gets hot? WHAT? WHAT?" they barked at bemused commuters at London King's Cross Station the other day.

Their leaflets warn of flood, fire and pestilence. Sound familiar? Sea levels are rising, they insist. The Amazon and Africa are on fire, the leaflets claim. (More fake news.) What about plagues of locusts? I'm amazed they left those out. They're convinced apocalypse is around the corner.

Their spokespeople go on television and say people will burn and starve and die of disease in their billions if we don't cut our carbon use. They make the fire-and-brimstone priests of old look like rank amateurs. Their vision is entirely dystopian. Like the morose oracles of old they foretell a time of great fire and hunger.

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A gang of young XR activists marched in London behind a banner saying: "WE CAN'T EAT MONEY." Do they know you can exchange money for food?

And what will bring all these calamities upon mankind? What is encouraging the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to pay us a visit? Our sinful behaviour, of course.

This is where XR people really start to sound like Old Testament hotheads. In their view humankind is due to be punished for its avarice, its hubris, its industrial arrogance. Only it isn't God who will punish us, it's Gaia. It isn't an angel of death who will wreak havoc among humankind, it is nature. They speak of nature as if it is a sentient force. They warn of "weather of mass destruction", as if storms and sunshine are all part of nature's fury with human beings.

UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres went so far as to say "nature is angry". What madness is this? He said that while hosting Greta Thunberg at the recent UN Climate Summit. Greta, of course, is the closest thing this cult has to a messiah. According to her mother she can even see carbon emissions. Truly is she the prophetess of doom of this new eco-cult! We must all bow down and listen to her childish wisdom.

This is the great irony of contemporary environmentalism: it speaks of science and claims to be acting in the name of science, but really it is an irrational, fearful and at times outright crazy movement.

It sees modern society as one big Sodom and Gomorrah, though our sins are environmental rather than sexual.

Most worrying of all, political leaders and the liberal media treat these loons seriously. They amplify their apocalyptic fantasies. They say, "Yes, you're right, mankind has destroyed the planet and now we must rein in industry and progress to appease angry nature." What this reveals is how little faith our leaders have in progress today. How little support there now is for the great human project of taming nature and using its resources to improve our lives.

Indeed, people of a green persuasion look on the Industrial Revolution itself as a mistake.

Naturalist David Attenborough, who has achieved godlike status in this movement, recently said that revolution "started the problem".

What an extraordinary statement. We have forgotten how harsh and horrible and unforgiving life was before industry and modernity.

The Industrial Revolution liberated humankind from enslavement to the land and from brutish, ignorant and short lives. And new industrial revolutions are doing the same for tens of millions of people today, from China to India to Brazil.

How arrogant of comfortable Westerners to demonise industry and growth, and to campaign against these things, just as other non-Western people are catching up with us and discovering the wonders of wealthier, longer lives.

Environmentalism represents humankind's loss of faith in itself. It's a backward, misanthropic creed. We shouldn't be indulging Extinction Rebellion. We should be making clear to these people that we have no intention whatsoever of enacting their depressing, deathly policies and instead will carry on pursuing progress and abundance and a world of wealth for all. Brendan O'Neill is editor of Spiked and host of Spiked podcast The Brendan O'Neill Show.

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